

September 15, 1986

To: Santa Traugott
From: Paul Gronke

Re: 1984 NES Question C.2 (ICPSR Var. 784) -- R's Party
Registration

The National Election Study has regularly asked respondents whether they were registered to vote and, if so, what party they were registered under. However, many states do not require the voter to officially declare a party. Some states have open primaries, and other states require the voter to select a party at the polling booth (but not to declare a party affiliation).

The question arises: how can a respondent tell us his party of registration when she is not required to have one? The item under examination is presented below:

Q.C.2. Were you registered in this election as being a
Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

651 1. Democrat
152 2. Independent
468 3. Republican
12 4. Other Party, Specify

R Volunteers:

111 5. Voters not required to declare party
4 6. Voters not required to register
1 7. I am not registered

30 8. DK
52 9. NA
776 0. Inap

A simplified coding scheme is used here. 1-4 above are grouped into "Party supplied," 5 into "R says party not required," 8 into "DK," and the rest into missing. I coded state registration laws as follows:

1 = Open Primary
2 = Not open primary; voter selects a party at the booth
3 = Unaffiliated can declare at the polls; others must have declared

some time previously
 4 = All must declare before the election day
 5 = First time voters can declare at the polls; others must
 declare
 beforehand
 6 = Declare at registration, but you can register the day of
 election

A more simplified coding scheme will be employed here, where 1-2
 above are designated as states not requiring party registration,
 and 3-6 as requiring it.

Crosstabulating the two variables results in this:

	Party Supplied	R says party not req	DK
No Party Regis	607	101	24
Party Regis	676	10	6
	1283	111	30
			1424

Chi-square = 88 (2 d.f.); p=.0000
 Tau b = -.24632; p=.0000

If the immediate aim is to assess the validity of this item, we
 can stop here. The question fails miserably. Almost fifty
 percent of the respondents who supplied us a party were not
 required to do so by their state of residence. The supplied
 response category is heartening; 90% of those who told us that a
 party was not required were accurate. The distribution of DK's
 is similar, though the number of respondents is small. In fact,
 in the face of these results, it is hard to see how this question
 survived in its present state for so long.

It would be interesting to speculate as to what this question
 really does measure: party identification, the most recent vote
 (but what of split balloteers?), etc. If someone is interested,
 I have a more detailed breakdown available (using the original
 coding categories). Such speculation, however, is not relevant
 here. It seems fairly obvious that this item, if it is to be
 included in future NES surveys at all, ought to be asked only in
 states in which it is relevant (i.e. those scoring 3-6 above).